

FLARE

MEDIA TRAINING

*Your Essential Guide to Being
an Effective Spokesperson*



ec-pr



Just imagine... the phone is ringing, and out of the blue a journalist is on the line asking you some tricky questions about your organisation's activities.

How do you handle it? What do you say?

The answers you give will influence both your personal and company reputation so it's important to be prepared.

Every journalist works to their own agenda, which is unlikely to be the same as yours.

Their job is to make the interview both interesting and engaging, while getting the information they want to develop their story.



Journalists have an array of techniques to get what they want, so you need to be fully equipped to respond effectively whilst getting your message across.

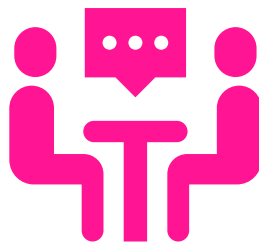
This guide will help you:

- To understand how the media operates and what reporters are looking for.
- To manage different interview styles.
- To confidently engage with journalists.

Why are interviews important?

Interviews provide spokespeople with the opportunity to showcase their organisation's expertise, knowledge, and authority.

A strong reputation can, in turn, help generate sales opportunities, attract employees, improve staff morale, and engage stakeholders.



The business case for successful media engagement is:

- To accurately reflect your organisation's strategy, culture and values.
- To reflect a positive image of your organisation amongst critical stakeholders.
- To educate, inform and persuade opinion formers and influencers on key issues to enable your organisation's objectives to be delivered.


UNDERSTANDING THE MEDIA

How the media operates:

Although there are a few exceptions, most media outlets are run on a commercial basis with the aim of making money.

While business models vary across different forms of media, the backbone of the revenue generally comes from advertising, event sponsorship and database marketing (i.e. selling access to their database).

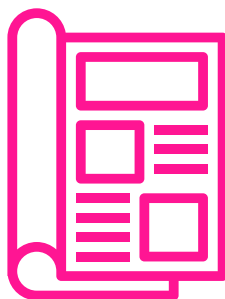




However, editorial independence is a clear indicator of quality; so, when dealing with a reputable publication, advertising should be an option rather than a prerequisite.

EC-PR's main point of contact is always with the editorial team who decide what will be in each issue, sourcing relevant and interesting content such as news and features.

Editorial is free, but because the content is strictly controlled, there is intrinsic value therein.



To secure editorial coverage, a contributor must take the time to develop a relationship with the editorial team rooted in trust and reliability.

The media must be confident that not only can a contributor provide interesting views/opinions, but they can also be available, often at very short notice.

Naturally, the higher the profile of the publication, the harder it is to secure editorial coverage.



If the opportunity sounds too good to be true: It probably is.

So, with this in mind, if you get a phone call from someone you don't know at the Guardian for example, claiming that he wants to profile your business, there's probably more to it than meets the eye.

Advertising and advertorial do have their place in the marketing mix, but they should never be confused with, or mixed in with pure editorial secured through a PR campaign, as the former will only serve to dilute the latter.



WHAT REPORTERS ARE LOOKING FOR:

Reporters are professionals whose job it is to secure and then convey information in the most interesting and accurate way possible.

However, as in any profession, there are good and bad practitioners.

Most reporters are generalists who cover anything that is considered worthy of airtime or column space. Generally, they are not subject-matter experts.

There are also industry specific reporters who will have developed extensive knowledge in specific areas such as technology, engineering, science and environmental issues.



Journalists working in different media are operating under different pressures and have different requirements.

1. Radio reporting

Radio reporters will be working under very tight deadlines - they can be writing a news piece literally seconds before it goes on the air.

Because they are limited to approximately 30-60 seconds to present their stories, they look for lively voice clips, often referred to as soundbites, of about 15 seconds which describe the “bottom line” of what the issue is and why it’s relevant.



2. Television reporting

TV reporters and producers look to inform and entertain viewers with exciting visual images and sound.

Like radio reporters, TV reporters have a limited amount of time in which to present their stories. They must simplify information to keep stories to an average length of 90 seconds.



3. Print reporting

Print reporters include those who work for daily and weekly newspapers, magazines and wire services.

Often, they will want a lot more detail than broadcast reporters, because they don't have the benefit of using visual and audio imagery. They rely on vivid descriptions to bring their stories to life and make them understandable and engaging.



4. Online reporting

These days almost every national print, radio and television news organisation has some form of presence online.

Journalists working for online media are under immense pressure to obtain information quickly and be the first to publish exclusive stories to stay ahead of the competition.



5.Blogs/podcasts

Requests for information are increasingly coming from bloggers who are playing a more prominent role in today's changing media landscape.

Blogs are not just about presenting a good quality story – it's also about providing a showcase for your subject matter experts to build their own personal brand.

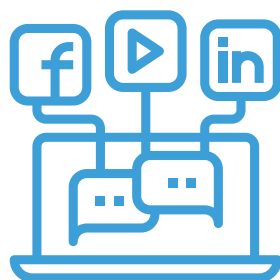


The Role of Social Media

Over 70% of adults are now getting most of their news via social media.

As a result, journalists are turning to social media channels to gather information, find useful sources and engage with interesting contributors.

A high proportion of national press journalists will be active on Twitter and in some cases, will tweet requests for comment/further information for stories they are writing.





HOW TO MANAGE DIFFERENT TYPES OF INTERVIEW

The rules of engagement

When dealing with journalists, remember that they are human too – they get it wrong sometimes and rely on you to put them right.

Commercial pressure has led to a situation where many journalists are now freelancers who work on multiple subject areas without the experience or subject matter knowledge that one would expect.

Use this to your advantage by being helpful, concise and informative while weaving in your key business messages. Use pauses to push the conversation onto areas that YOU want to talk about.

“An engaging interview is essentially a good conversation. It’s as simple as that.”
Peter Allen, BBC Radio 5 presenter

Essentially, interviews will present themselves in three ways:

- Phone interviews – unplanned
- Email – unplanned/unsolicited
- Phone/email/radio/tv interview (planned)



Phone interviews (unplanned)

There may be the odd occasion where you'll receive a call from a journalist who is looking for some answers from you.

The questions he/she might ask may be tricky, therefore you must feel confident in dealing with this type of scenario:

Give yourself time to prepare

- Don't be afraid to say to the journalist that now is not a good time and ask if it's okay for you to call him/her back.
- Find out when their deadline is and don't leave it too late. This gives you time to think through what you need to say, particularly in response to tricky and /or sensitive issues.
- Never say 'no comment' – it makes you sound guilty and can come across as if you are trying to hide something.



Have something worthwhile to say

- If there are controversial/sensitive issues in your area of expertise, work out where you stand, and don't be afraid to air those views – but make sure you can justify them.
- By approaching the interview in this way, you are more likely to get name checked in the paper.
- Furthermore, the journalist will not think twice about coming back to you in the future; it's easy for people to say, 'well we don't really comment on issues like that' – that's fine, but don't be surprised when the reporters don't bother to call you again.



Make it interesting and relevant

- Avoid talking theoretically – use tangible examples which will bring across the reality of the points you are trying to make.
- Have facts and specifics to back up any opinions. If you've done your homework, you should be able to stress points that you know are going to interest the journalist's readership.
- Don't get obsessed with your own internal messages – weave them in but be selective and thoughtful to keep them relevant.

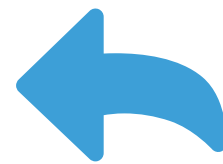


Email (unplanned/unsolicited)

Whilst the telephone is the preferred method of contact, a journalist may send an email requesting answers to specific questions or a general statement from an organisation.

The rules of engagement are like that of a phone call:

- Reply to the journalist, acknowledging that you've received his/her email and provide a timeframe for your response so that you can manage their expectations (unless of course they have provided a specific deadline that they are working towards).
- Don't overpromise, knowing full well that you can't deliver. Responding via email can be more advantageous than a telephone call as you're in complete control of your answers and will also have an audit trail, if you're misquoted in the published article.

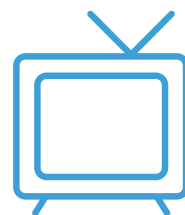


Phone/email/radio/TV interview (planned)

Unless you already have an effective network of established press contacts, unplanned opportunities aren't likely to happen very often.

If your PR consultancy is doing its job and talking to the relevant journalists regularly, pitching story ideas etc, interviews will be planned. In which case, there will always be appropriate time to prepare.

EC-PR provides clients with a preparation document to ensure that all bases are covered. Use your preparation time to familiarise yourself with the points on the following page:



Familiarise yourself with...

- 1.** What the interview is going to be about – pre determined questions can often be made available to you, but it depends on the journalist.
- 2.** What angle the journalist will take.
- 3.** The profile and target audience of the magazine.
- 4.** Who the interviewer/journalist is and obtain a biography if available?
- 5.** Who else will be involved and/or who else the journalist is talking to?
- 6.** Whether it will be live or pre-recorded for later broadcast.
- 7.** What form the final broadcast will take.
- 8.** How long the final interview will be.
- 9.** How long the final programme will be.

TOP TIPS

Journalists are expert storytellers with inquisitive minds. Provide them with interesting, engaging and informed answers and they will, in most instances, present your brand in a positive light. So, keep the following in mind:



Be sure of your facts.



Be honest.



Make clear points with supporting evidence.



Keep your answers simple and assume the audience/interviewer has no previous knowledge of a subject.



Avoid grandstanding or showing off.

TOP TIPS



Plan, but also be prepared to be responsive to unexpected opportunities/questions.



Think about what you can tell the audience that's new and interesting.



Never be unkind or indiscreet in the presence of a journalist.



Listen to the questions and do not become preoccupied with your own message.



Try to understand and empathise with what the interviewer is trying to achieve.

NOTES ABOUT TV INTERVIEWS

1. If you want to be accepted as a serious, professional presenter, your attire needs to be both comfortable and appropriate.

People shouldn't judge you on your appearance, but they will.

Avoid:

- Spots, stripes (including pinstripe shirts and suits) and small patterns – they make the camera go squiffy ('strobing' to be precise).
- Red, black and white, the safest colour on TV is blue.

Ensure that everything about you fits with the message that you're giving.

If your message is one which is sombre, then dress accordingly - leave the Homer Simpson tie at home.



2. For a live interview, ask what the first question is likely to be before filming starts to help you prepare. The interviewer will have prepared a list of questions and is likely to share some of them with you beforehand. Remember, the interviewer wants the interview to go well just as much as you do.
3. When delivering a TV interview, always provide answers succinctly and passionately, whatever the question!
4. If seated, sit upright, look at the interviewer's eyes, eyebrows, forehead or nose - never down (the perception will be that you're lying) or up (you're simply guessing). Answer the questions posed but always bring it back to your key message.
5. Remember that nerves are part of the course – everyone, including famous people will experience nerves before a television appearance. Use your nerves to create energy.
6. Finally, ensure you leverage such an opportunity by telling past and present clients, as well as prospective clients, and if possible, include a link on your website.

Body Language is important!

As soon as you find out you are doing a TV interview, start practicing in the mirror and once you're happy with what you see, record yourself using your phone and look out for the following:

Positive Gestures and Expressions

- Look your interviewer in the eye.
- Lean slightly forward, if seated.
- Make hand movements that occur naturally as a supplement to what you are saying.
- Listen intently to the question.
- Listen to what the interviewer has to say.

Negative Gestures and Expressions

- Inappropriate smiling, laughter.
- Tightly clasped hands.

Negative Gestures and Expressions (cont)

- Hands gripping sides of chairs, tables, knees; hands toying with pen/pencil, water glasses, buttons, microphones; drumming tabletop, microphone.
- Tightening and loosening of jaw.
- Ramrod straight, unnatural posture.

Impatient and Uncomfortable Gestures

- Swinging legs.
- Shifting in chair.
- Shifting eyes.

Guilt and Uninterested Gestures

- Casting eyes toward ceiling.
- Failure to look at the interviewer.
- Slouching posture.
- Closing eyes.

THE TYPES OF QUESTIONS THAT JOURNALISTS MAY ASK

Journalists have a whole array of approaches and tactics they'll use if needed. Some of the different types of questions they'll use include:

Open ended questions: These are questions where you cannot reply with a straight yes or no such as: 'What do you think the issue is?'



Forcing questions: Kay Burley is famous for these types of questions where the journalist will try to put you into a corner by saying 'just answer the question, are you or are you not going to make people redundant?'

Leading questions: This is where the journalist will try and put words into your mouth. It is a question portrayed as a statement. An example would be 'So what you're saying is that it won't mean increased costs for your customers?'

Hypothetical questions: This is a way of getting you to give a definitive answer to something that hasn't yet been defined. An example here would be 'If that were the case, what are you going to do about it?'

Prompting questions: This is as it says on the tin. It is a simple request for more information.

Probing questions: These types of questions may seem quite harmless, but you may find yourself in a situation where you say more than you intended. An example would be 'that's an interesting point, how do you personally think this will affect the industry?'

Journalists' manner may vary according to their situation – these can include friendly, curt, naïve, direct and rushed. Don't be put off or distracted by their manner. Keep focused, breathe deeply and respond authoritatively.

Contact Us



Call: 0203 740 6080

At EC-PR we are passionate about B2B communication. We believe your work is amazing and we want to help you tell the world how extraordinary it is.



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